



Global Forum of Faith-based Organisations for Population and Development



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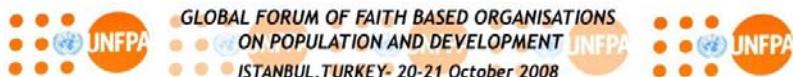
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Background

In the lead up to this historic gathering of the faith-based organizations mobilized around the ICPD Programme of Action, UNFPA hosted four regional fora on FBO engagement. The regional fora took place in Durban, South Africa (December 2007), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (May 2008), Cairo, Egypt (July 2008), and Buenos Aires, Argentina (September 2008).

The theme of each regional forum was built on the issues around which a legacy of partnership with FBOs evolved in the different regions. FBO participants were selected from among existing and potential partners of country and regional offices. In each forum, discussions focused on lessons learned, and successful partnerships between UNFPA and FBOs on ICPD areas (family planning, violence against women, women's empowerment, HIV&AIDS, youth and migration). Outcomes of the deliberations included a series of recommendations to enhance partnerships (see attached).

The Global Forum

On the 20th of October 2008 over 160 religious leaders, faith-based organizations and United Nations representatives¹ spanning the globe gathered in Istanbul, Turkey, to establish an Inter-faith Network for Population and Development. The Forum featured 60 representatives of UNFPA and other United Nations bodies, as well as over 100 representatives of faith-based organizations (FBOs) from five regions (Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean). In addition to the regional faith-based representatives, the Forum hosted religious leaders, and resource people, including representation from the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), who have made UNFPA's Culture work possible since 2002.

¹UNESCO, WHO, ILO, UN-Habitat, UNAIDS, UNDESA, UNDP, and UNICEF

As noted by UNFPA Executive Director, Ms. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, discussions at the Global Forum revealed overlap and similitude of language used by UNFPA and faith-based representatives. Together, faith-based representatives and the United Nations increasingly speak of the “right to human dignity”. The Executive Director stressed that “this is an important development, as it shows a greater understanding of each other’s worldviews”.

Highlights from opening addresses

Mr. Mahmood Ayub, UN Resident Coordinator, Turkey, affirmed that the Global Forum was “about political action, empowering women, reducing HIV and AIDS, violence against women, and human rights.”

Ms. Safiye Cagar, Director of UNFPA Information and External Relations Division (IERD), stated that “UNFPA has a record of sustaining partnerships with FBOs, by providing technical, logistical, and financial support”. UNFPA can play the role of facilitator by bringing years of experience in building partnerships with parliamentarians and youth networks. Ms. Cagar went on to say that networks bring many benefits, including knowledge sharing and enabling South-South partnerships.

Ms. Obaid noted: “I firmly believe that partnerships are the only way forward if our ideals of human rights are to become living realities for every man and woman, young and old, and this network can help further our common goals. Sustainable social change must be deep-rooted in communities, and while UNFPA and FBOs have different mandates and different means, we can work together towards common objectives.”

Mustafa Cagrici, Deputy President of Religious Affairs, reminded participants of the value in using religious texts to promote and defend fundamental human rights. He reiterated the multiple references in the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Islam, to the equal rights of all human beings, and the obligation to protect them.

The opening address was followed with the first part of a two-part video developed by IERD, in close consultation with the Technical Division. The two videos are entitled “The Power of Faith”, and “How to Reach Common Ground”.

The opening ceremony included a session led by religious leaders, in which representatives from different faith traditions made statements of commitment to UNFPA-FBO partnerships. The following quotes are excerpts from their statements.

“When the essence of religion and spirituality are universal human values, it is vital that we drop our minuscule identities, join hands and take bigger responsibilities to make this world free of disease, stress and social evils.”

Mr. Anish Dua, On Behalf of His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, India

“I would like to emphasize that it is in our duty as faith-based organizations and religious figures to take action in cooperation with UNFPA and many other organizations.”

Ven. Phramaha Boonchuay Doojai, Thailand

“In the 21st century, to be religious is to be inter-religious.”

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, United Kingdom

“We should no longer stay silent, and should walk, hand in hand.”

Mr. Elias Szczynicki, Peru

“Globalization of poverty, HIV and AIDS, family violence, and racial discrimination are not localized problems – they are global. We have to have interfaith cooperation to bring ethics to the forefront.”

Imam Sheikh Hassan Ezzeddine Ali Bahr al Uloom, Iraq

“We recognize the participation of our sisters, but yet they are the object of violence and discrimination.”

Rev. Julio E. Murray, Panama

The Global Forum hosted five thematic panels designed to facilitate the sharing of experiences of FBOs in tackling challenges in population and development, as well as their success stories.

The first day of the Forum hosted panels on “HIV and AIDS and Maternal Health”; and “Youth and Migration”. FBOs from different religious traditions and representing the five regions (Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Latin

America and the Caribbean) presented respective activities and initiatives on ICPD areas, much of which was done in partnership with UNFPA. Each presentation addressed ongoing challenges, successes, and provided recommendations to enhance the Interfaith Network.

Highlights from day one -- The Power of Faith

- All agreed on the role of FBOs in fostering effective change and transformation in local communities, including the part they can play in the development of government policies;
- FBOs are strategically placed on the ground to nurture and enrich human life, especially in the context of globalization and in the face of contemporary global challenges such as HIV and AIDS, the global financial crisis, the food crisis, and the rising cost of living;
- This is a period of interdependence wherein FBOs and UNFPA need to work together for social transformation;
- There are values and beliefs in all faiths traditions that provide the foundation for a set of common fundamental rights, including the right to physical and mental health;
- All faiths have shared visions and common denominators in human dignity and human rights;
- There is a need for national and regional interfaith alliances to support a *global* interfaith alliance, and vice versa, to strengthen on-going FBO efforts on ICPD areas;
- In all regions of the world, FBOs continue to serve as community centers - they are respected in society, and seen as co-leaders along with the elected political leaders. In this respect FBO actions are significant in influencing local norms;
- This is a moment when many FBOs are reaching out to the international development community in a call for partnership.



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